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2013

# Review of Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity

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## Original Citation

Jackson-McCabe, Matt. "Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity." *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, vol. 8, no. 1, Jan. 2013, pp. 1-4.

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Edwin K. Broadhead

***Jewish Ways of Following Jesus:***

***Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity***

(WUNT 266; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), hardcover xx + 440 pp.

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This study of what Edwin Broadhead calls “Jewish Christianity” begins with a provocative comparison of traditional Jewish and Christian historiography with colonial rhetorical strategy. British colonizers, we are told, justified their occupation of Australia by decreeing that there had been no prior claims on the land despite tens of thousands of years of aboriginal presence. In much the same way, the orthodox Christians and rabbis of late antiquity “imposed their dominance upon the religious map of their own time” by means of “[a]n ideological form of *terra nullius*,” not least with respect to “Jewish Christians” (p. ix). The orthodox winners, for example, asserted their own “primal status” by either entirely reading Jewish Christians “out of existence” or by “incorporat[ing] them into the identity and history of the victor[s] themselves” (pp. ix, 47). The central aim of this book is “to isolate and to collect” the surviving “historical markers” for this “Jewish Christianity” in order to place it back on the map and thus to “lay to rest any assertion that Jewish Christianity did not exist or that it did not matter” (p. 2). In the process, it seeks to problematize the “parting of the ways” paradigm of traditional scholarship by calling attention to the existence of groups throughout antiquity for whom Judaism and Christianity were not mutually exclusive alternatives.

After an initial section, Part One, addresses past scholarship (chapter 1) and the methodological issues involved in definition (chapter 2) and historical reconstruction (chapter 3), the

great bulk of the study proceeds to its central task of identifying such “historical markers.” The data is divided into three categories. “Points of Origin,” which is to say the Jewish character of Jesus, the earliest communities of his followers, and the earliest Christian literature, are examined in Part Two (chapters 4-6). “Patristic Representations” are discussed in Part Three (chapters 7-11). A hodge-podge of “Other Evidence,” namely “Texts ascribed to Jewish Christians” (chapter 12), “Rabbinic Evidence” (chapter 13), and “Archaeological Evidence” (chapter 14) is found in Part Four. The final section, Part Five, presents a brief review of scholarship on the so-called “parting of the ways,” and a still briefer critique of the whole model in light of the “historical markers” the book has assembled (chapter 15). A final chapter presents a general re-view of basic findings (chapter 16).

The end result is a wide-ranging survey of evidence traditionally associated with the category “Jewish Christianity.” In this sense it is broadly analogous to Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik’s edited 2007 volume *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, though from the point of view of a single author, and with subjects treated in less depth. While the specialist may find little that is radically new, the book provides an accessible introduction to, and a useful conversation partner in, an increasingly important field of research.

As always in studies of “Jewish Christianity”—a notoriously variable category over the history of scholarship—matters of definition and classification are crucial. This is particularly so in a survey of this kind: in order to identify the remains of something and thus establish its ongoing existence and significance over centuries, one must have a clear sense of what that something is, and thus what will count as an instance of it. In the chapter on definition, Broadhead defines the “Jewish Christianity” with which he is concerned as those in antiquity who both “follow Jesus” and “maintain Jewishness,” particularly by “present[ing] themselves as faithful Jews standing in continuity, in both thought and deed, with God’s covenant with Israel” (pp. 56-57). To the extent that this definition

emphasizes self-understanding, it represents an approach that is potentially more helpful than the usual focus on Torah observance as the definitive feature of “Jewish Christianity.” This move, however, stands in some tension with the author’s decision to present the phenomenon as “Jewish Christianity,” a term that is *not* a part of the self-identity of any of the individuals or groups in question, and which in fact creates problems that surface elsewhere in the study and are never adequately resolved (compare p. 79 and p. 158, where the term “Jewish Christianity” is conceded as being problematic when applied to Jesus and to the Synoptic sayings source, respectively).

There is also at times a certain disconnect between this theoretical definition and the actual practice of classifying data on which the book’s general thesis depends. The identification of the earliest literary remains of “Jewish Christianity” in Part Two, for example, relies largely on a set of criteria whose relationship to the book’s working definition of “Jewish Christianity” is rather ambiguous. Thus the *Didache* is identified as “Jewish Christian” on the basis of its appropriation of “Jewish source materials”; its use of “the Old Testament” as an authority; a Jewish “prophetic model” for community leadership; its Christology; and its eschatological orientation (pp. 131-33). A broadly similar set of criteria are brought to bear on the Letter of James (pp. 133-34), while the Letter of Jude is said to stand “firmly in the realm of Jewish Christianity” (p. 135) simply due to a “conceptual world...built upon the literature of Palestinian Judaism” (p. 134) and a “guiding ethos...of Jewish apocalyptic thought” (p. 135). Such judgments seem to assume something more akin to the (long abandoned) “Jewish thought-form” construction of “Jewish Christianity” of Jean Daniélou in his 1964 book *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* than to the identity-oriented approach postulated by Broadhead’s own theoretical statement. Why we should assume, in the case of these works, that such traits correlate with claims on Jewish identity and on Israel’s covenant in particular is not said. Nor is it clear, conversely, why a supposedly more Hellenistic “tone” and self-consciously post-apostolic orientation in themselves suggest that the same traits

are less likely to signal “Jewish Christianity” in the case of 2 Peter (p. 135).

While such issues underscore the as-yet unsettled problem of the utility of “Jewish Christianity” as an interpretive construct, this book presents a useful entrée into the data that have given rise to it. Both those new to the field and specialists will find the book useful in their own ways.